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SUBJECT: IRPT CONFIRMS KABIRI AS CHAIRMAN IN EMOTIONAL CONGRESS

CLASSIFIED BY: Tracey Jacobson, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy

Dushanbe, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) confirmed Muhiddin Kabiri as its chairman during an emotional political party congress with members still mourning the loss of former chairman Said Abdullo Nuri. The IRPT delegates presented a united front and members gave impassioned speeches, pledging to carry on Nuri's legacy. After the congress, Kabiri met with international representatives, where he appeared visibly strained, which may reflect the pressures on him from internal political strife and the risks of being a popular "opposition" politician in Tajikistan. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The Islamic Renaissance Party unanimously elected Acting-Chairman Muhiddin Kabiri to the position of Chairman for a four-year term during a party congress meeting September 2. The media, international missions, political scientists, and other political parties joined the 236 delegates that convened at IRPT headquarters in Dushanbe to witness this expected, yet momentous change. In a three-hour meeting, all congratulated and praised Kabiri for his strong leadership. Many expressed confidence he would continue Nuri's dreams and establish a greater role for the IRPT in Tajikistan. The People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan made a point of calling Kabiri its friend and emphasized the two parties' "friendship" like "the kind Nuri and Rahmonov had." (Note: Rahmonov did not show up at Nuri's funeral or pay respect to his family. END NOTE.)

¶3. (U) During Kabiri's acceptance speech, he declared he was not ready to announce his political agenda. He catered to the party's love for Nuri and tried to champion Islamic rights, by

promising to continue Nuri's leadership and said that if people support Islamic values, they should support the IRPT. He was humble and thanked the party for its trust in him and called on party members to criticize him and supply him with advice.

¶4. (U) In addition to Kabiri's election, the party also voted for a new high presidium and secretariat. In a largely symbolic move, the party elected Nuri's son Qori Muhammadjon Nuri to the high presidium. He is currently studying in France and did not attend the congress. At Kabiri's initiative, the congress also unanimously voted for Muhammadsharif Himmatzoda as the IRPT's spiritual leader. Kabiri views Himmatzoda as a mentor and recognizes the popular leader deserves an official position in the IRPT. Some in the press had pegged Himmatzoda to be the next IRPT chairman, but an illness prohibits him from being active. IRPT members prayed for his health.

#### IRPT UNITED-IN PUBLIC AT LEAST

¶5. (U) Participants gave speeches congratulating Kabiri on his election and praised him for being a fair, modern politician who can lead the party forward. Critics within the party have commented Kabiri is too modern and eschews traditional Islamic values. In what may have been a planned campaign, several conservative members of the party acknowledged rumors of a rift and potential split in the party, and purposefully praised Kabiri, admitting that his beardless appearance is of no importance. One remarked, "He has no beard, but this is not a shortcoming. Do not pay attention to his appearance, pay attention to his heart."

¶6. (U) The party also dispelled rumors of other IRPT officials competing for power by having them take the podium and speak in

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support of Kabiri. One such official, Said Ibrohim Nazar, a Kulobi who is the IRPT's Head of the Department of Culture, made a pointedly short speech commending Kabiri for being a "rare politician" who will take care of the party and implement Nuri's dreams.

¶7. (C) Embassy sources say Nazar also allegedly traveled to the Sughd region which has a strong IRPT support base and asked delegates to vote for him as party chairman instead of Kabiri. The Sughd members refused. Prior to Nazar's visit, some members from Sughd did not plan on traveling to Dushanbe for the party congress because the expense would be too great for them. Outraged by Nazar's proposal, they all wanted to show Kabiri their loyalty and every one of them made the trip to Dushanbe, despite financial hardship. Realizing that Kabiri would win, Nazar, along with IRPT Deputy Chairman Jaloliddin Mansurov, in a heated discussion among the presidium, tried to convince the party to elect Kabiri to only a one year term. They reasoned that Nuri only served three years out of his four year term and the new chairman should only complete the last year of that term. They were unsuccessful.

#### THE CHAIRMAN'S FIRST OFFICIAL DUTY- LUNCH!

¶8. (SBU) After the formal congress, attendees divided into separate rooms for lunch. Organizers announced that Kabiri would have his first lunch as chairman with representatives from international missions. (COMMENT: This may not have been a shrewd move on Kabiri's part, given past criticism from the government that he is an "agent of the west" and his own party members' concerns that he is too modern, too liberal and travels too much instead of paying attention to internal party issues. END COMMENT.)

¶9. (U) Attendees at the traditional Tajik lunch included PolOff, Ambassador Sotirov from the United Nations Tajikistan Office of Peacebuilding, diplomats from the Iranian, Russian, and Kazakh embassies and a senior political advisor from the British Embassy. The lunch was short, lasting less than twenty minutes. Kabiri looked visibly tired and acknowledged that being IRPT chairman carried a lot of risk and responsibility.

He recognized the work ahead of him as the presidential election draws closer. Towards the end of September, the IRPT will convene another congress and select a candidate to run in the November 6 presidential election. No date has been set yet for the congress and no candidate announced.

¶10. (C) IRPT members tell Embassy sources that Kabiri traveled to Poland one day after the congress on September 3 to participate in international economic conferences and also to undergo medical examinations. Kabiri allegedly suffered from a minor heart attack recently.

UNITED WE CRY, STILL MOURNING NURI'S DEATH

¶11. (U) On the heels of Nuri's death last month, each speaker felt obligated to say a few words about Nuri's leadership and his critical role in the peace process following the civil war. At the mere mention of Nuri's name, several delegates would cry, particularly if someone broke out in a poetry recital. When Kabiri stepped up to deliver his acceptance speech, he symbolically placed flowers in front a gigantic wall sized picture of Nuri and spoke reverentially about Nuri prompting the entire room to break down in tears with all delegates loudly weeping.

¶12. (U) The deference given to Nuri was overwhelming. The congress meeting at times appeared to be a memorial service for

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Nuri rather than a political party meeting electing a new chairman. Many spoke of IRPT members as "Nuri's followers" and conferred upon him a saint-like status.

A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE BACK OF THE ROOM

¶13. (U) Of the over 200 delegates at the congress, about fifty were women. Women hold positions in the IRPT as journal editors and local officials of women's branches, but the congress did not elect a single woman to the presidium or secretariat. During the meeting, all women delegates sat in the back of the room, silent in their hijabs. None spoke during the congress, unless specifically called on by a high official. Occasionally, a presidium member would call on a representative from the women's section to speak on behalf of all the "sisters."

COMMENT

¶14. (SBU) Although Kabiri promises to follow in Nuri's footsteps, his modern leanings, savvy knowledge of international affairs, and amicable personality will take the party to a different level. He will continue to preach Nuri's message of tolerance and pluralism in the government, but may also be inclined to reform the IRPT from within, granting more significant roles for women and strengthening the moderate branch of the IRPT.

¶15. (C) In the party's next congress, it will select a candidate to run in the presidential election. In past meetings with PolOff, Kabiri has said that he does not want to run in the election, but his party's desire and the call to duty, may override his own personal wishes. For example, he had long proclaimed no desire to become chairman, even when Nuri personally requested it of him.

¶16. (C) The party managed to give off a strong united image during the congress meeting. Despite stories of rifts and potential coups, most members still recognize that in order for the party to survive, it must remain united at this point, at least through the presidential election. Even Nazar will not want to create waves publicly, because he will likely compete for the party's presidential candidate nomination. If he is unsuccessful in gaining his party's support once again, the party may face real internal strife.

END COMMENT.  
JACOBSON